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Kosovo Liberation Army Promises Independence

Conflict in Kosovo has focused considerable attention on the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK in Albanian), which vows to create an independent Kosovo for the Albanian majority living there. Serbian denunciations of the "terrorist UCK" include detailed assertions that the organization's support and direction are provided by Albanian hroin and arms traffickers, abetted by Croatians. Regardless of the truth of these assertions, the UCK has gained a new prominence in regional-security affairs. A June 1998 interview with UCK representatives gave insight into the way UCK wishes to be perceived. The representatives insisted that because of the continued oppression by Serbs, the UCK was formed as an army of liberation, and that the UCK believes it can never succeed except by force of arms. They described the UCK's armaments as light infantry weapons and quantities of anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. Tactics were described simply as "getting up close, to within a few meters of the Serbian special forces, opening fire, and then rapidly withdrawing." The UCK claims that its membership is rapidly increasing because of an influx of volunteers, but the representatives did not provide any strength figures. The UCK representatives expressed the hope that the U.S. would intervene, but they do not foresee that happening "until there has been a bloodbath".